General Outlook on Christian Syndicalism

As Seen by the C.F.T.C.

Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens

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MAIN

ÉDITIONS DE LA C.F.T.C.
11 bis, Rue Roquépine
PARIS (8e)

Prix : 5 frs

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Internationalism is not a new idea in the working-class. We should therefore, not be surprised that the need for the Organisations of Trade-Unions to make contact between themselves, to harmonise if not unify their action should have been felt by the organisations of Trade-Unions of Christian Workers as soon as they began to develop.

On 29th July 1900 a meeting of the Textile Christian Trade-Unions of Germany, Belgium, and Holland took place at Aix-la-Chapelle, in view, of creating, between these organisations, a community of professional action. During two years these organisations kept in touch with the Socialist International of Textile Trade-Unions but soon after, they had to stop owing to the hostility which they felt more and more and they could only maintain relations between Christian Trade-Unions.

The Trade-Union of Employees of Commerce and Industry of Paris in September 1903, took part in the International Congress of Employees in Brussels; the Representatives were only admitted after a hard fight during which they claimed the right for the Christian workers to organise themselves in Trade-Unions and to participate, on the same footing as the other workers to the discussion of their professional interests.

From 2nd to 5th August 1908, the delegates of the Confederations of Christian Trade-Unions of Germany, Austria, Belgium, Holland, Russia, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland met at Zürich and decided to create an International Secretaryship to be run by Stegerwald who was then general secretary to the German Confederation, and an International commission presided by Giesberts.

The war came and showed the fragility of international bonds when there are placed in competition with interest and specially with national egotism, and put an end to the activity of the international workers-organisations already existing.

And yet the war was not over when on the 7th, 8th, and 9th of June 1918, the delegates of the French Federation of Christian Trade-Union Employees, our friends Despoût and Tessier met at

Le Havre the delegates of the confederation of Christian Trade-Unions of Belgium, to consider with them the questions of Social Order which would come up when hostilities had ceased and were setting up a project of relations to be established between the Organisations of Christian Trade-Unions of the countries of the Entente. On the day after the armistice the delegates of the Christian Trade-Unions organisations of Belgium, Spain, France, Holland, Italy, Lettonia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romand Switzerland met in Paris from 16th to 18th March 1919.

The congress of Paris brought the constitution — in principle — of an International, the Head-quarters of which, were fixed in Brussels.

A meeting took place on the 20th February 1920 at Rotterdam between the delegates representing France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. This meeting enabled the Delegates to discuss the possibility of organising a congress which would help — so it was thought — to create a new International which would take the place both of the pre-war one and of the one which had been spontaneously created in March 1919.

The congress took place at the Hague in June 1920. 98 delegates represented the following confederations :

Germany, Austria, Belgium, Spain, France, Catholic Holland, Protestant Holland, Hungaria, Italy, Switzerland, Czekoslovakia representing a total of 3 millions and 1/2 workers.

The congress of the Hague entrusted the presidency of the International to Switzerland the Secretaryship and Treasury to Holland.

And so the International Confederation of Christian Trade-Unions (C.I.S.C. Confédération Internationale des Syndicats Chrétiens), called International of Utretch was created.

The first confederal congress took place at Insbrück in June 1922. The following points were discussed; the general economic and financial situation born from the war, the stabilisation of changes, the cancellation of inter-allied debts, the reduction of non-productive expenses, etc...

The congress of Lucerne took place in September 1925 and studied, in particular, the questions of emigration, of the rights of Labour in the organisation of production and of the relations between the C.I.S.C. and the International Labour Organisation.

The C.I.S.C. met in Münich in 1928. Although it would have been necessary to cross out from the active members the Italian confederation which had disappeared owing to the triumph of the fascist regime, 14 confederations belonging to 11 countries were represented.

The 5th congress which was held at Anvers in June 1932 studied in particular the problems of economics, set by the crisis, and of social politics necessitated by the rationalisation, unemployment, colonial questions and feminine labour.

Unfortunately, a new blow was going to strike the C.I.S.C. as well as the working class : the coming of the Hitlerite regime in Germany and the repercussions which the instauration of a corpo-

rative regime, in fact, suppressing Trade-Unionist freedom, had in Austria on the organisations of Trade-Unions.

Following these events an extraordinary congress was held at Montreux in June 1934. More than 100 delegates belonging to 9 confederations of 7 countries were present at the congress. 30 professional Internationals had sent representatives.

The last congress of the C.I.S.C. before the war, took place in Paris in 1937. The International of Christian Trade-Unions was presided by Jules Zierheld, president of the French confederation of Christian Workers (C.F.T.C.) who, died in December 1940 and Serrareus who, since 1940, stayed in occupied Holland as secretary.

Since the liberation of territories occupied by the enemy, it has been possible to make contacts with Belgium, the liberated part of Holland, France, Switzerland, and the confederation of Basque workers. The fact that its secretaryship, its records, its documents, are still in the hands of the enemy, have not permitted to group usefully all the responsible people that were in function at the time of the declaration of war and still less to have a Congress.

But the various confederations of Christian Workers which have carried on their work in spite of the troubled times and those which begin again their activity in the countries where Trade-Unionist Freedom has been re-established in an effective manner keep faithful to the principles set out at the Innsbrück congress in 1922 which might be summarised as follows :

"The International confederation of Christian Trade-Unions is inspired both by christian and moral doctrine and considers them as the foundation on which economic and social organisation must be based.

"The aim of economic and social organisation is the human being : but the human being is soul and body. This organisation must therefore have in mind the material well-being of man which he naturally covets and help him to reach the spiritual perfection to which he is bound.

"All the theories that consider the enjoyment of earthly blessings as the only object of human life or at least as the exclusive aim of society, are tainted with materialism and in contradiction with Christianity."

By its own existence the C.I.S.C. has shown that neither Catholism nor Christianity in general, can accomodate themselves — as it is made believed — to amoral conceptions of international finance and economic liberalism and that the christian workers have still got enough appreciation of the doctrine that Christ has brought to the world not to make it the keeper and the accomplice of egotists and loose appetites.

But the C.I.S.C. has also rendered very appreciable services in the economic and social field.

The frequent meetings between the heads of the national movements enabled them to unite their efforts for the maintenance or the establishment of measures of protection for the working class in various countries. Thanks to this understanding, a conti-

nued pressure was made on the various governments to bring them to ratify the conventions of Washington and the conventions and recommendations of the International labour conferences. The action of Christian Trade-Unions, in some countries, has been all the more effective that it took place in parliamentary circles sometimes ill-disposed to social reforms.

Those same meetings have enabled all the people to exchange their views on the best methods of Trade-Unions organisation. At the time when the importations of foreign labour were important, they have brought between the confederations of several countries the conclusions of real conventions regulating the professional and trade-unionist situation, of immigrant workers.

The action of propaganda and help has been fruitful either by creating or, by bringing to the C.I.S.C. new confederations, or by establishing cordial relations with those which special reasons still prevent from participating to the movement.

On the other hand, thanks to long and concerted efforts, thanks also to the action intented before the Permanent Court of International Justice at the Hague by our general secretary Serrareus, in the name of the two Dutch confederations to establish the juridical definition "of the most representative organisations" the door of the International Labour Conferences was opened after their strong energetic push. They have acquired an important place in the deliberations and one can recall with pride the part which the general secretary of the C.S.U.C., Gaston Tessier, Technical Counsellor of the French governmental delegates since 1922, has taken in the discussion of the Reform of the 40-hour week.

Albert Thomas who was director of the I.L.O. mentioned with gratefulness in his speech to the congress of the C.I.S.C. at Münich in 1928, the price which he attached to this loyal and devoted collaboration of Christian Trade-Unionism.

So the working class who for a long time has considered Christianity as a barren doctrine feels in itself a new sap, feels a renewed energy and sometimes contemplates with astonishment, often with sympathy, and always with confidence those rights but not separating, however, the satisfaction of these rights from the accomplishment of their duty.

WHY CHRISTIAN UNIONS ?

By PAUL VIGNAUX

(March 1943)

One feature in the progress of European labour at the end of the first World War was the growth of a trades union movement which drew its inspiration from Christianity and more specifically from Catholic social doctrine. Before discussing this movement I shall give the following data. In 1920 and 1922, unions of German Christian workers (not including white collar or state employees) numbered more than a million members; and in order to measure the importance of these Christian unions in relation to the "free" unions (socialists) it must be noted that the membership of Christian labour unions was concentrated in the Catholic regions of Germany, especially in the west, and that in the mining regions, for exemple, this membership totaled more than a third of all organized labour. In Italy, the Italian Confederation of Workers had 1,250,000 members in 1919-1922, while the membership of the General Confederation of Labor (socialist) varied between 1,200,000 and 2,500,000.

In France, the Confederation of Christian Workers, organized in 1919, grew steadily up to 1940 and represented between a sixth and a seventh of total union membership. In Belgium, the growth of Christian syndicates rose to more than 300.000 members, the socialist membership being 600,000. In Holland, the membership of the Catholic unions, together with that of Protestant organizations with which the Catholics collaborated, was just about eual to the membership of the Socialist Confederation. These labour unions, moreover, represented only one aspect of the action carried out by Catholic workers. They also had a strong influence on political parties such as the German Centre, Don Sturzo's Popular Party, the Catholic Parties of Belgium and Holland; they were grouped in such organizations as the *Katholische Arbeiter Vereine*, in Germany; the National League of Christian Workers, in Belgium; the Catholic Workers Leagues, in Holland—finally it was in the same circles, in Belgium and France, that the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Chrétienne* (Jocistes) was crearted and grew rapidly in importance.

The totalitarian wave submerged these organizations, but the forces to which they gave expression remain intact. And their social tradition still lives. The Italian Confederation of Workers fought Mussolini up to 1925; reports reaching us through the socialist underground show that among the people there still were in Italy Catholic and anti-fascist centers of resistance. It is also indubitable that the Catholic workers' tradition did not disappear in Germany with the advent of Hitler. In Holland the resistance shown by

organizations of Catholic workmen has been splendid in its strength, discipline, and unanimity. In Belgium the Christian trade unionists are as strongly opposed to the "New Order" as are their socialist comrades. And finally, in France, the cooperation between leaders of the *Confédération Française des Travailers Chrétiens* and the *Confédération Général du Travail* has formed an essential factor in the whole resistance of the labour movement, a factor which neither Pétain's authority nor Laval's cleverness have been able to eliminate.

It is therefore plain that we have here in the existence of this Christian labour movement in Western Europe a social fact which it is impossible to disregard. I use the world Christian rather than the word Catholic. Not only because in Germany the Christian workers' unions included a Protestant minority, and not only because in Germany the Christian workers' unions included a Protestant minority, and not only because in Holland there existed specifically Protestant organizations, but also because in France, for instance, the Christian labour movement was not formed exclusively through the adherence of practising Catholics. In fact it welcomed and was open to—more and more so as time passed—all workers that approved its principles and action in industrial relations. For labour organization and labour unions are not Catholic Action; they function in the realm of temporal affairs.

Why then did there exist in Europe labour unions which were Christian and even specifically Catholic? That is something which always puzzles English and Americans because they are accustomed to conditions in the labour movement which are fundamentally different. One can answer their question only by recalling a whole historical background.

The pioneers in the Christian labour movement where the Ruhr miners and the textile workers of Ghent who, at the end of the nineteenth century, already possessed a long labour union tradition. As long as their unions remained similar to British unions, these Catholic workmen were active members in them: but when these organizations passed under the control of the socialists of the period, doctrinaire Marxists and violetnly anti-clerical, the workmen who remained faithful to their religion left their unions and founded—not without considerable hesitation and reflection—unions of their own which declared themselves inspired by Christian social doctrine. In other countries a similar break took place.

The formation of a Christian trade unionism can only be explained by the ideological background of the European labour movement. Fundamentally what took place was a reaction of Christian workingmen against the social-democrat, or syndicalist ideologies of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. To this conflict of ideas there was added the struggle of the Christian minority to find its place, a place which would ensure that its interests were represented, at the side of organizations which in general were numerically more powerful and which were accustomed to speak in the name of the entire working class.

In Europe Christian organizations had acquired, or were acquiring, their rightful position and their proper influence, and they were doing this with the consent of the socialist organizations when

the fascist revolution came, or the fascist conquest. Wherever the Christian workers movement represented a real strength in the European countries (where the union shop generally speaking does not exist), the Christian labour unions took part in collective bargaining along with the socialist organizations. The two movements had come much closer to each other, not only because the socialists recognized that the Christian organizations were bona fide labour unions, but because their own ideology had changed. In denouncing the totalitarian tendency of the Communist Party, social democracy was putting a new emphasis on the democratic aspect of its ideology, on the dignity and freedom of individuals, and this brought it nearer to the "personalism" of the Christians, a personalism more and more freed from medieval reminiscences or clerical prejudice. In France the dominating ideology within the *Confédération Générale du Travail* became, between 1919 and 1940, a constructive unionism terminating in a *plan* for the nation's economy which did not greatly differ from the plan of the Christian labour unionists. And to these reasons whicy furthered an understanding between labour unions, one must add a final and dominating factor, the threat and then the dictatorship of fascism which gathered in one simple opposing movement all men determined to defend free trade unionism. A common purpose gathered together all the militants of the democratic workers' movement. That is a certain fact, but the question is : will this unity in opposition to dictatorship create one single united labour organisation ? That question history alone will answer. We shall not attempt to give the answer here and now. But without encroaching on the future there are certain signs, and factors which may be noted.

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Henceforth Christian trade unionism appears as a strong and living party of the workers' democratic movement. When the Christian trade unionists plan, as they do in Belgium and in France, to rebuild their own destroyed organizations as soon as the war is over, they plan also to have these organizations act in full coordination with all other bona fide unions, in a manner that will prevent any rivalry or discord that might weaken the working class in its economic action. The autonomy of Christian organizations, in their minds, springs from and corresponds to an existing diversity in spiritual and cultural tendencies, and provides a greater facility for educational and constructive work. For their part, certain socialist leaders are inclined to admit that a coordination and an agreement with the Christian union leaders would provide a form of unity more effective than that possible in a single united organization in which thousands of militants of very differing traditions and ideologies would find themselves constantly exposed to friction and disagreement. Given the historical background of the European labour movement this attitude appears to me as the wiser and the more realistic. Yet there will be others who will attempt to merge the Christian labor unions into a single national union. The success of this appeal will depend largely on the personality of those who make it. Will they be labour leaders sincerely attached

to a conception of political independence of the trade union movement, to the tradition of democracy to a respect for individual freedom ? Will they be men attached to the Communist Party, following a common front policy which has always been opposed by the Catholic workers ? Without making any premature forecast it is possible to say at the present time that the essenial task is to prepare in a freed Europe the reconstruction of those general conditions of freedom, freedom of speech and of association, which will allow workers of every tendency to choose democratic formes of organization. Rather than to speculate as to the nature of these future forms of organization it is essential to survey the various forces which can act to rebuild a democratic workers' movement. No matter what shape and organization they may adopt in the future, the Christian workers constitue one of these determinant forces in Western Europe.

Obviously they constitue a minority movement. But, in democracy, the majority must take into account minorities which can show that they are coherent, stable, capable of intelligent action and sufficient in numbers to make themselves heard.

The Christian labour union minority was not equally distributed throughout Western Europe; it was particularly strong and active in regions which by necessity will be called upon to play a major part in a federal organization of the European "region": Southern Holland, Belgium, Northern France, Alsace-Lorraine, the Rhineland, Northern Italy. Acting as a liaison body between the whole of the democratic labour movement and the forces of progressive Catholics, the Catholic workmen will share in the task of rebuilding Europe, and their action after the war will be simply a continuation of the part they have played in Europe's resistance to the fascist New Order.

Determined and unyielding on democratic principles, but with a strong tendency toward reconciling the workers' claims with a conception of the "common good" of the community, a Christian labour movement can be a powerful factor in the rebirth of Europe's labour movement. For this labour movement during the period of reconstruction must act less as a pressure group than as an agent and, if possible, a central element in constructive political union. And here I am thinking of and alluding specially to the " constructive unionism" which was the doctrine launched in France in 1919 by the leaders of the *Confédération Générale du Travail* and which, in many of its aspects, was a forerunner of the New Deal. Europe will find itself living again in freedom but doubtless its awakening to freedom will be in an atmosphere of confusions and passion. Currents of neo-nationalism and of demagogy will threaten perhaps to break down the first attempts at reconstruction. What will be needed then, and greatly needed, will be popular forces which can further mutual understanding and provide stability. That is why it will be necessary in my opinion to call first of all upon all the men, the militants and the leaders of the democratic labour movement, whether their intellectual formation comes from social democracy, from syndicalism (the socialists) or from Christianity. These men, these leaders, have found that they could work together in resistance to the enemy; they should find, they must find, when the time comes, that they are able to work together in

the task of rebuilding Europe. This reconstruction must be based on the deep and mutual desire of all European workers; it must be based—for this is what they desire—on new forms of cooperative economy freed from any irresponsible domination. The new forms must be freed from the domination of the great financial and industrial interests as much as from the domination of the totalitarian—and even from the authoritarian state.

THE CONGRESS GENERAL MOTION

It is time to consecrate the "majority" of the working class.

The French Confederation of the Christian Workers, gathered in a National Congress from the 15th to the 18th of September asserts its faith in the Christian social principles and in the program or professional organization prompted by them. A unity between the Trades Union without denying its advantages, demands unity on the principles, the spirit, the method, for want of which it would only end in an appearance of fusion with a confusion in the ideas.

The C.F.T.C. states that it is ready to realize any agreement for- and action allowed by respect or their independence. It thinks, on the other hand, that as our legislation and customs and psychology of the people, stand at presen, plurality of Trade Unions is but what our democratic liberties demand and a way of enriching the working movement itself.

The reasons to belong to the Christian Trade Union are given by gram which is equally distant from economical liberalism, from its program which is equally distant from economical liberalism, from paternalism and marxism, and leads to build a better society which would serve the human person and its higher aims.

Principles of the C.F.T.C.

The fundamental principles of any social action are a certain understanding of man, of family and social life.

Man has an eminent dignity of thinking and free being, which bestows him inalienable rights and high responsibilities.

Family : is a natural society whose fundamental statutes cannot left to the will of a human legislator and which counts among its essential rights: right of the father to secure with his kork the family's living; right of the wife to fulfil her mission as a home-

keeper; right of the parents to give to their children the kind of education they have chosen; right of access to private property, efficient guarantee of the freedom scale necessary for the family.

Society is made for man and not man for society. The State which is the basis of it, is must direct, stimulate and help all the energies of the nation and not absorb theim into a system of totalitarian unification. More particularly, it should neither encroach on the right of association nor enslave profession.

A profession constitutes a peculiar society which is based on a free trades union man, with a collaboration of classes which demands a legal statute which acknowledges its competence and its autonomy in order to settle relations between producers and to discipline production squaring with national and international economy.

Social organization : If we want it to be actually humane, we must reject materialism and call for the cooperation of moral and spiritual forces.

C.F.T.C. and Security of workers

The C.F.T.C. considers that economical progress must enable workers to be taken out of proletarianism by granting them at last with a security statute.

Security in material life — Grant of a fair salary and of a family overpay settled according to the cost of living and enabling mothers to stay at home — coherent policy of national food supply and eviction of useless intermediates — raising of women salaries (improvement of the statute of land workers).

Security in work : Methodical organization of the prevention of accidents — reform of the insurance system — revision and strict carrying out of the sanitary regulations survey of the problems raised by rationalization — effective strengthening of the Factory inspection.

Security before the risks of living. Reform of Social Insurances raising of the pensions for old worers — Drafting of a vast scheme of social security which supplies on this subject the country with sanitary equipment, which simplifies administration and makes trade-unions participate in the management organizations, without aiming at nationalisation or antinatural unification.

Security in employment : organization of registering which, without eliminating liberty, forbids whatever can be politically unsincere as for engaging or locking out bold policy of prevention of unemployment — higher indemnities for unemployed — sitting up of an insurance for unemployed on a trade unionist basis.

Security in accomodation : Repression of black market of rents — working up of a vast scheme of repairing the damaged houses — of a vast scheme of popular building as well as real family homes. Settlement of a living allowance.

Security by access to property : incitement to popular saving — Legal facilities granted to any system which enables the workers to possess the means of production and to acquire a house and a plot of ground.

The C.F.T.C. and promotion of work

The C.F.T.C. thinks time has come when we must consecrate the majority of the working class in taking it out of the state of inferiority it still is in before capitalism.

This promotion means on the individual level an organization or professional direction and apprenticeship which would take into account the just rights of families.

It requires on the collective level, the actual insertion of work with widened responsibilities in the frame of the factory, the profession, the national economy.

This incorporation will only succeed by the work of a free and strong trade unionism which will also be constructive and educative — It is the duty of State to increase the influence and form of Trade Unions in giving them a statute which would determine, owing to the new state of things, their rights, their powers, their representative authority which would be more than previously an efficient guarantee for freedom and independence of their leaders, which would trust them at last some offices, such as labour exchanges, or insurances for unemployed, in order to enlarge their recruiting without being obliged to call for obligatory tradeunionism.

The C.F.T.C. however thinks that the work of Trade Unions does not include actual political duties — They must stand outside and above the parties.

The C.F.T.C. and Planned Economy

The evolution of Economy, the duty imposed on us to build up the country again, and adove all Social justice make it imperative for France to organize a system of planned economy in which general welfare predominates over particular interests, and in which man shall strive to maintain as best possible and discipline the necessities of liberty, private property and individual profits.

In order to play its trading part, the State must undergo a deep constitutional and administrative reform, and possess modernized equipment. The C.F.T.C. think it is advisable to create, along with the Ministry for National Economy, organizations socially and economically competent, the necessity of which is obvious, one of those, the National council for French Planned Economy would have it as a task to think out the plan and see to it that it is carried out.

Professional organization must be worked out on the basis of compulsory enlisting of all workers, statutes for the personnel, organization of Professional branches ruled by smaller commitees, socially and economically competent, an administration, services, funds, regulations and laws for arbitration in case of disagreement, lastly a professionnel juridiction having as a final authority a sort of Supreme Court.

The professions will be grouped into syndicates, and through the channel of its representative, the state will act as a guide and adviser, as well as a guardian of possessions in common.

The nationalized Section will be an exceptional organization. It will be limited to monopolies and enterprises, concessions, Public utilities and general welfare. This organization must be based on fair participation of all workers and discard as much as possible methods involving close domination of the State.

International organization of Labour and Economy must be the crowning of this professional syndicalism. It calls for the restauration of competent governments in all countries and international cooperation, both social and economic.

The C.F.T.C. and the Reform and business and industrial concerns

In order to break the power of trusts and financial oligarchies, and give to capital its role as an instrument and not as a master, the structural reforms must bear on the statutes on which the concerns rest.

The law of July 24th 1857 on anonymous concerns must be revised. Personalisation of capital should be encouraged, as well as responsibility of administrations whose managing should be supervised and controlled.

The contract of wages should tend to be a Contract of Association, with participation of workers in administration profits and ownership of the concern.

The C.F.T.C. stands for increase of power given to the Concern Committees : better statutes for delegates of the personnel; representation of workers in the Concil of administration; possibilites for disqualifying any employer guilty of incomptence or transgression of contracts and regulations encouragement should be given

to participation in profits and shares, and also working gangs and all means of increasing the profits and production of the concern.

The C.F.T.C.'s Mission

The C.F.T.C. stands for private property, restauration of family ideals, professionnal organization, high standard to be given to human labour and morals. It is proud to serve the cause of progress and social peace, and think they can only be attained through these seans.

This program is addressed to the mass of all workers, men and women, labouring in field ou factory, civil servants, technicians of all kinds, believing in Christianity or not but having faith in this social doctrine.

The C.F.T.C. feels sure that now, when the history of the world is undergoing one of its gravest crises, it is serving the cause of the people, of democracy, of our land de France and of Christian Civilization.

R. ROYER, Imprimeur
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